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SUBJECT: Caritas on North Korea: Unified, Willing to  
"Fight to the Last Drop" of Blood, But Still Hungry

REF: 02 VATICAN 3637

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Summary  
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11. (u) Catholic Church relief network Caritas works with the people of North Korea to combat poverty and malnutrition. Post recently met with Kathi Zellweger, who oversees Caritas' operations in North Korea and who spends considerable time there, to review developments in that country. Zellweger reported that: (1) the firmly unified North Korean populace shows no indication of challenging its government; (2) the people believe attack by the United States is imminent and unavoidable; (3) the government is increasingly willing to experiment with capitalism; and (4) food availability in the DPRK has increased but is irregular. End summary.

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North Koreans "will fight to the last drop" of blood  
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12. (u) "Unity is high," Zellweger said, and North Koreans "will fight to the last drop" of blood for their nation. The Chong-il regime will continue for many more years, she believes, even as it sacrifices millions of lives through poverty, malnutrition, and repression. Communist indoctrination in North Korea has been exhaustive. With most North Koreans having grown up under Communism and without exposure to any other way of life (even cut off from Western television), the relatively high levels of education and literacy have failed to generate any youth movements for change.

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North Koreans Believe U.S. Attack Imminent  
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13. (u) Based on their reading of U.S. involvement in Iraq, as presented by state news agencies, the people of the DPRK are convinced, according to Zellweger, that attack by the United States is imminent. The invasion of Iraq even after inspectors were admitted, the "dubious" justifications for that war, and the classification of North Korea as a member of the "axis of evil" have made many North Koreans believe they are next in line for American-imposed regime change. The people of North Korea feel doomed, Zellweger added. The commitment to fight against any aggressor has been fueled by DPRK indoctrination, starvation, poverty, and an unprecedented sense of unity.

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Special Economic Zones and Capitalism  
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14. (u) Although North Korea has established a special economic zone in the northeast region of Rajin-Sonbong to develop trade relations with Russia, Japan, and China, Zellweger believes this has largely failed. Business leaders from China, the most promising trade partner, avoid the inconvenient and uncomfortable trip into the region. As a result, the North Koreans are hoping that a planned second special region closer to the border with China and along the train route to Beijing will have more success. While it expounds communist theory, the DPRK regime is increasingly willing to experiment with limited and controlled elements of a market system. Twelve months ago, prices were set for certain goods and services previously provided by the State. Zellweger has noticed that the expanded use of a monetary system to pay for goods and services (as opposed to government handouts) has given rise to a more price-conscious public. She hears complaints that goods are overpriced and unaffordable. She said that with the movement towards some basic market mechanisms, the people appear increasingly interested in planning and dreaming of a better future that could even include tourism.

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Hunger Update  
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5.(u) In this fiftieth year of the divided Korean peninsula, circumstances in North Korea remain grim, Zellweger said. Although food availability has increased and acute malnutrition has decreased since the crest of the crisis in 1995-1997, North Korea is still heavily dependent on international food aid. The recent WFP announcement of

food aid cuts to North Korea will affect some three million of the country's current 6.4 million beneficiaries. The most pressing humanitarian problem is the shortage of food. Cereals, pulses, soymilk, sugar, and cooking oil are desperately needed before the year is up. Contributing to the problem is the lag time between donation and delivery. Food donations typically take six months to reach recipients, Zellweger pointed out.

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Caritas in North Korea  
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16. (u) Caritas is permitted extended visits to North Korea and relatively unrestricted contact with the people. It has regular access to 162 of North Korea's 260 counties, encompassing 85 percent of the DPRK's population. Zellweger has documented living conditions during many of her visits to the country. The films have been edited into a six-and-a-half-minute video. Zellweger agreed to provide a copy to Post.

7.(u) Caritas works in North Korea to increase the number of people fed, maximize the nutritional value of food provided, and realize their "helping people to help themselves" principle. To these ends, Caritas has developed two new initiatives: (1) fish farming and fish egg distribution and (2) sweet potato harvesting and nutritional fortification. Both plans, as well as Caritas' seed distribution program, aim to cultivate self-sufficiency and combat starvation.

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Comment  
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8.(sbu) Zellweger is a significant source of information on North Korea, as her access allows for a rare view into conditions throughout the DPRK. Zellweger's main message for the USG is to "send more food." Zellweger seems relatively optimistic that economic engagement will contribute significantly to North Korea in time opening up to the West as well as helping to achieve better living conditions for its long-suffering people. End comment.

Nicholson  
NNNN

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